

# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KIDS

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Lassen Children & Families Commission Newsletter

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CHILDREN  
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COMMISSION



## ORAL DISEASE The Silent and Neglected Epidemic

The Children & Families Commissions of Lassen, Plumas, Modoc and Sierra Counties identified poor oral health in young children and limited access to dental care as a significant health issue facing their region. As a result, a two-day oral health summit was held to address these issues. This effort was supported by a generous grant from the California Children & Families Commission. The goal of this summit was to improve oral health and access to regular dental care for children prenatally to age 5 and their families living in the four county region.

At the beginning of the summit, the forty-two participants shared what they personally and professionally could contribute to the meeting and outlined their expectations. Each person also received a binder of resource and workshop materials, along with samples of infant oral health products. Themes of Prop 10 and the role of the Children and Families Commissions were reviewed and a glossary of oral health terms provided to establish a common ground.

The first afternoon focused on sharing

knowledge regarding oral health issues, and highlighting assets of the region as well as gaps in services. In the evening, a panel of dental health care funders and providers discussed strategies and resources available to improve children's oral health.



Dr. Francisco Ramos-Gomez

Dr. Ramos-Gomez, a pediatric dental public health specialist from UCSF was the key note speaker on the second day. He provided a lively overview of interdisciplinary approaches to children's oral health. Dr. Ramos-Gomez discussed the causes of early childhood caries—the major chronic disease affecting young children—and ways that all health professionals and children's programs could help prevent this infectious disease. He stressed the fact that oral health is integral to general health and that a mother's oral health affects the baby's health, so counseling should start prenatally.

Dr. Ramos-Gomez focused on early childhood caries (ECC), commonly known as baby bottle tooth decay.

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Early Childhood Caries

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Dr. Ramos-Gomez focused on early childhood caries (ECC), commonly known as baby bottle tooth decay. ECC is rampant dental decay (dental caries) in the primary teeth of infants and toddlers. It is caused by frequent and prolonged exposure of the teeth to sugar and the bacteria *Streptococcus mutans*, which is transmitted to infants by caretakers, usually mothers. This bacteria in the infants mouth, coupled with a night time bottle or drinking at will from a bottle during the day produces devastating results. The relationship between a mother's oral health and that of her infant is important. Reducing a mother's cavity-causing bacteria will limit the amount of bacteria that is passed on to her baby.

Dr. Ramos-Gomez explained how baby teeth are important for development of speech, eating skills, social acceptance and self-esteem, along with maintaining space in the jaws for permanent teeth. ECC dramatically increases a child's risk of future dental caries. Young children with untreated dental caries develop poor

***Communities are improved because individuals convinced other individuals to think and act differently.***

Winer and Ray, Collaboration Handbook

eating habits, speech problems, and so-



## TIPS FOR PREVENTING ORAL DISEASE AND INFECTION

- Never put a child to bed with a bottle.
- Reduce frequent sugar consumption
- For infants up to six months, clean mouth with gauze after feedings and bedtime
- For children age 6 months to a year brush teeth with small, soft-bristled brush and a smaller-than-pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste after each feeding and at bedtime
- Schedule first dental visit by 12 months of age

### Dental Sealants

Dental sealants are thin plastic coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of the molars to prevent dental decay. Sealants are safe, painless, and take only minutes for a dental professional to apply. Teeth are brushed clean and sealants are painted onto the teeth. No drilling or anesthesia is required.

Sealants are slippery and make it harder for plaque that causes decay to stick in the pits and grooves of molars.

### Fluoride

Use of fluoride reduces tooth decay. Research shows that fluoride reduces cavities by up to 50 percent in children. Toothpaste and drinking water may have fluoride.

Community water fluoridation can reduce cavities in children by up to 40 percent. Providing fluoridated community water costs about 50 cents per person per year—much less than the costs of a single filling.

Children's oral health is  
a Community  
responsibility!



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### GLOSSARY

**EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES (ECC):** preferred term for early aggressive dental caries in young children; it is an infectious disease, transmitted primarily from mother/caretakers to babies. Some methods of transmission include "wet sloppy kisses", tasting babies food first to be sure it is not too hot, and cleaning a pacifier that has fallen on the floor with your mouth and then giving it back to the baby.

**BBTD: Baby Bottle Tooth Decay:** a very destructive pattern of dental caries associated with giving a child a bottle with liquid containing some form of sugar, at will or to fall asleep.

**DENTAL CARIES:** Technical term for dental decay.

**CARIOGENIC:** Something that promotes tooth decay (e.g., foods high in sugar or acidic soft drinks).

**CHLORHEXIDINE:** An antimicrobial rinse that is used to reduce the number and viability of bacteria that cause dental decay and gingivitis.

### Coming Events

#### December

##### ***Friday, December 1, 2000***

Promising Practices Workshop: Home Visiting and Family Support — Lessons Learned from San Mateo County's Prenatal to Three Initiative.

San Francisco Airport Marriott  
For reservations contact The Prop 10 TA  
Center 1-877-827-7671

##### ***Tuesday, December 12, 2000***

Putting the Pieces Together for Sustaining School and Community Based Dental Programs,

Sierra Health Foundation, Sacramento  
8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., \$18.00 Registration Fee. Additional \$10 for CEUs. Contact the Dental Health Foundation with any questions (916) 920-1175.